



Society for Social Work Leadership in Health Care
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The Society for Social Work Leadership in Health Care (SSWLHC) is a membership organization of professional social workers engaged in practice throughout the health care continuum. As advocates for both sound public policy and for our clients we are uniquely situated to provide input to the Transition Team. In addition, many of us are also consumers of the health care system as well as caregivers of older loved ones. It is from these two perspectives that we came together for a ‘Health Care Community Discussion.’

On January 29, 2008 we hosted a conference call of thirty five (35) of our members from across the United States. The call was chaired by Charles L. Robbins, DSW President of the SSWLHC.

While we do recognize the value of incremental improvements, we call upon you to undertake a fundamental overhaul of the present health care system which is cumbersome, expensive and produces questionable results. Being able to live your life to the fullest requires having access to quality health care services. We believe this is must be a fundamental human right for every person in the United States.

What does the group perceive as the biggest problems in the health system?

We spent the majority of our time focusing on this question. The following represents the foundation of the themes that emerged from our discussion.

- Lack of universal coverage – we believe that all people must be assured a minimum standard of health care services
- Lack of a single payer system – implementation of a single payer system would greatly simplify the delivery system as well as significantly reduce the administrative costs.
- Lack of standardization – there needs to be standardization of quality, benefits as well as limitations across payers, providers and geographical regions
- Lack of catastrophic coverage – no one should be forced into financial despair as a result of health care bills

Other significant points raised by the participants and discussed by the group included:

- Hospitals are too often utilized as a safety net because of the lack of availability of more appropriate cost effective community based services.
 - The Medicare rule requiring a three day hospitalization before patients can qualify for long term care or rehabilitation is burdensome and costly as it results in unnecessary hospitalizations
- Through the use of enhanced Healthcare Information Technology we should focus on prevention and early intervention. This is particularly true for our aging population, many of whom are living with multiple chronic conditions

- There needs to be a better integration of behavioral and physical health services. Best practices exist that demonstrate the effectiveness (both cost and health outcomes) of co-locating physical and behavioral health services.
- It is essential that any health care proposal include adequate attention to behavioral health
- There needs to be payment reform including:
 - Traditional Medicare and Medicare Managed Care alignment
 - Alignment of payments to primary care physicians and specialty physicians
- Any health care reform has to focus on both quality and prevention
- We urge support from both sides of the isle for HR 676
- There are increasing numbers of children who are technologically dependent who must remain in high cost hospitals as there are no community supports/services
- Palliative care needs to be a reimbursable benefit
- There needs to be better coordination of Medicare and Medicaid benefits as well more consistency in the coverage provided across the States
- Current incentives are misaligned
- Attention must be paid to:
 - Medical school curriculums
 - Pharmaceutical companies
- Any health care reform proposal must address the significant link between poverty and negative health outcomes and health disparities.
- Accessibility must include transportation reimbursement

There needs to be a fundamental new health care infrastructure. This must include culturally competent care that provides options/choices, includes community education, simplifies the administrative structures and procedures, emphasizes holistic care, evidence based practice and pay for performance.

Finally, we believe that our Country needs to take positive public policy steps to educate the public on healthy life choices and preventing chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes. We believe the President Elect can use the positive good will he is experiencing to bring around a fundamental change in our Nation's health behavior.

Professional social workers are uniquely qualified and situated to provide input into both the examination of our health care system and the creation of a new health system that meets the needs of all of our people. The Society for Social Work Leadership in Health Care stands ready to partner in any possible way toward the creation of a true health care system for all Americans.